

'Invisible', 5.5 million informals are at risk of losing R \$ 600 aid

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When the couple Viviane Santos, 26, and Adriano da Silva, 39, learned of the emergency aid of R \$ 600 for informal and low-income freelancers due to the pandemic of the new coronavirus, the feeling was of relief. "But, when we saw the bureaucracy to get the resource, it was as if the end of the tunnel was further away", says Viviane.

"Work since the pandemic has been reduced to zero", says Adriano, who is a bricklayer. Without a steady job and living in an occupation on the outskirts of São Paulo, they never counted on the government for the basics: water, electricity or sanitation. Internet access, which Viviane would use to book cleaning, is also rare. "It is as if we were invisible", they summarize.

Among economists, it is almost a consensus that the benefit of R \$ 600 for unemployed, self-employed and informal low-income workers is essential to avoid the collapse of millions of families, who were left without income during social isolation. But making the appeal reach those who were not part of programs like Bolsa Família or were enrolled in the Cadastro Único (a government instrument that identifies low-income families) is more difficult than it seems.

The first challenge was to enroll 11 million who were not in the government's Single Registry, but are entitled to the benefit, according to a calculation by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Ipea). The second is to make the payment. For those who do not have a bank account, Caixa Econômica Federal has promised to create 30 million digital savings, operated via the application.

But more than 5.5 million Brazilians with an income of up to half the minimum wage, eligible to receive the benefit, do not have a bank account or regular access to the internet, shows a survey by the Locomotiva Institute, done at the request of the State. Almost invisible part of the population, they are at the greatest risk of not receiving aid.

"The coronavirus crisis took away income and threw many people who had little, but were not the target of social programs, into the poverty. The virus sheds light on problems that already existed, such as the low income of informal workers, and accentuates historical inequality", says Renato Meirelles, who is president of the Locomotiva Institute.

Real life. Where public power does not reach, those who need it most join. In Rio, it is an association of street vendors that registers and monitors the benefit request for colleagues without internet or bank account. "We place the order and monitor the progress," says activist Maria de Lourdes do Carmo. "If we don't come together, everyone will suffer."

"The aid comes from NGOs and associations that have never had the sympathy of this government", recalls the director of FGV Social, of the Getulio Vargas Foundation, Marcelo Neri. "Action is needed: the crisis came after five years of rising poverty. At the end of 2019, inequality in income from work, in short, stopped rising, but it should grow again."

"The aid is well designed. The challenge is to reach everyone," says Pedro Herculano de Souza, a technician at Ipea who studies income inequality.

On Friday, Caixa Econômica Federal reported that 9.1 million people who signed up for the program through the application or website would receive the R \$ 600 installment until today.

Sought, the bank did not respond until the conclusion of this report how the government will make sure that the aid reaches families without an account and access to the internet and how they will move digital savings.

See too:

Number of coronavirus deaths may be more than 10 times higher in Ecuador province